COLD SUN – Dark Shadows
(World in Sound, Germany) CD

Texas psych expert and UT scribe Patrick Lundborg rates Cold Sun's *Dark Shadows* as "the best Texas LP after *Easter Everywhere* and [the Golden Dawn's] *Power Plant*." Jello Biafra, a punk who knows a thing or two about psychedelia, goes even further, calling it "the best psychedelic album I know of." Pretty heavy accolades for an album that didn't even find release until more than twenty years after its creation. Yet *Dark Shadows* easily lives up to its reputation as a Texas psychedelic monster of the first order, and this newly remastered reissue from World in Sound will only enhance its status.

The album was recorded at Bill Josey's Sonobeat Studio in Austin in 1970, but remained in the vault until 1991 when it saw a limited vinyl release on Rockadelic. That pressing sold out in no time at all as word got out, and its legendary status has grown from there. (For a more in-depth examination of the Cold Sun story see Lundborg's website: *www.lysergia.com*)

Cold Sun seemed to use the Elevators of *Easter Everywhere* and *Bull of the Woods* as a blastoff point, but there are also strong echoes of the Velvet Underground (especially *Live '69* era) in their sound. It would be easy to use some kind of rock-crit analogy here along the lines of "Imagine if the Velvets were from Texas instead of New York and were into peyote instead of heroin, blah blah blah..." but that's a bit like asking you to imagine that a tiger has spots instead of stripes and is called a leopard. In other words, while they share a number of common traits, they're completely different animals.

The urgent, Roky-inspired vocals and striking peyote poetry of Bill Miller's lyrics are in the foreground of Cold Sun's music, a sound made even more distinctive by his use of autoharp. Miller's playing goes beyond the typical full-chord thrum and strum of that instrument, sometimes taking an aggressive, almost percussive approach, like someone hammering on the strings of a grand piano, at other times providing a propulsive melodic ripple, like a Wurlitzer electric piano. Tom McGarrigle's snaking lead guitar work is also a key element, his subtle use of echoplex and controlled feedback giving the music an otherworldly quality that complements the surreal, dreamlike imagery of Miller's lyrics. His playing is particularly effective on the creepy "South Texas," one of the album's standout tracks, along with "For Ever," "Fall" and the fast-chugging "See What You Cause," which sounds a bit like the 13th Floor Elevators doing "Waiting For the Man."

World in Sound's expert remastering job improves on the earlier Rockadelic version, revealing the full richness of Mike Waugh's bass playing, his subtle countermelodies and scurrying runs at times playing a similar role to Tommy Hall's jug playing in the Elevators. The CD also adds two fine bonus tracks, "Live Again" and "Mind Aura," recorded live in 1972. Soon afterwards Cold Sun would mutate into the ALIENS and join forces with Roky Erickson, accompanying him on his seminal early solo recordings, including the classic "Red Temple Prayer (Two Headed Dog)."

Today Miller goes by the name Billy Angel and plays alongside ex-Angry Samoan Greg Turner in the Blood Drained Cows. The interview below was conducted via e-mail in December 2008. (N.B. The last two questions and answers were added by Billy; make of then what you will.) **(MS)**

An Interview with Billy 'Bill Miller' Angel:

UT: Originally you didn't want the Cold Sun album to ever be released, or even heard. What made you change your mind?

Billy: What seemed less cool in the '70s and later eventually seemed cool again at last. Time contributes to the puzzle aspect of reality. It's enough to know and believe that time has this effect. I suppose there is no lack of irony in the nature of this material being from the point of view of someone fairly obsessed with the quest to open the secrets of time. The Dr. Doom type mask in the recent photo of me in the CD tray (back of booklet in LP version) is not merely by chance. Where are they, now, eh? Some are trapped, I fear, in a far worse place than an iron mask. Sometimes I feel the cold steel on my face when I want to break the laws of time.

There was a strong sense that the Cold Sun album was existing in the wrong time, the wrong world. If these are delusions they are easily fuelled by the serious nature of this business of public releases.

There was *another reason* I did not want anyone to hear this, because there were production flaws. This was a more musically ambitious project than the Texas producers were capable of doing well. I think that the Elevators were fortunate to have gotten results from Texas producers that were not far worse. Anyway, I felt *certain* that a technology would someday exist and be in place, a technical capability that would allow the product to be completely remastered completely devoid of the defects of the Texas production. I'd consider this now to be a German production, and a very good one. If it were to have sounded this good in 1970, I would have not been glad to see it unreleased. Maybe there will be options to improve it further in the future, but it has now well exceeded the point from where it sounds as good as it needs to sound.

UT: What inspired the use of autoharp?

Billy: Originally, I perceived this as a type of sawed off piano that, equipped with electromagnetic pick-ups, would be an alternative to piano and organ and guitar—combining characteristics of all three. It dwells in an area that guitar and keyboards do not, with the way it is laid out as a harp. I do not play like an autoharp player. I play like a bass player, somewhat, with my right hand and like a sax player with my left hand. I manually play the notes in ways that a regular harp player would not.

UT: What made the set-up of your instrument different in terms of stringing, amplification, effects, etc?

Billy: I have a more heavy duty volume knob mounted on a metal platform. I use two full-length pick-ups and use a combination of bass and guitar and autoharp strings. Additionally, I developed a pair of small metal claws that are mounted on the back of the instrument and powered by elastic. These claws grasp or release from a holder-bar that I wear on a strap. This bar is welded to the bottom of a metal shield, which keeps the claws from causing injury to me. It is designed to allow me to remove the harp easily or attach it easily, but it is not 'strapped' to me like a guitar or bass. This allows me to *pivot* the instrument as I play in order to have manual strength in ways that would not ordinarily be possible. It allows extra leverage for my wrists and fingers from angles that would not be easy to play from with a conventional autoharp strap.

In the days of Cold Sun, I actually leaned the bottom corner of the autoharp on the top of my belt. I wore out lots of belts. The newer innovation was an improvement in strength. I began using this new innovation around the time of the first shows with Roky Erickson. Some may have noticed me doing more fast lead lines and other things related to the extra strength and dexterity I gained by being able to pivot the exact angle of the instrument.

UT: Obviously the 13th Floor Elevators, especially *Easter Everywhere*, were a huge influence on your sound. Can you explain your attraction to the Elevators sound?

Billy: I think this is very exaggerated. The ALIENS never get much comparison to the Elevators even though we were backing the Elevators singer. I think that it is correct that the ALIENS and Elevators are not very similar. But, if you compare Cold Sun to the ALIENS there would seem to be *far* more similarity than to the Elevators.

I would find *Bull of the Woods* to be much closer in nature to Cold Sun than the other Elevators albums. Someone said that Cold Sun might be a missing link between the Elevators and ALIENS. I could see that as being true far more than the notion that Cold Sun was influenced by the Elevators. I will say, however, that the Elevators *did* set an example of being able to break the rules and be accepted for it. I would agree that they were one of the elite few who raised the bar in the area of being uncompromising.

UT: Any good stories about seeing Roky and the Elevators play back then?

Billy: Well, I did see them play many times. I saw their last show. I saw them with the original rhythm section and with the later one. I was at the show in which Roky was taken away for three years. He was backed by an I.A. band—the earlier begining of his solo career. Five years later, I could feel some sense of continuing a project that had a five-year gap in it but taking it much further in that direction.

UT: Can you tell us a bit about Bill Josey Sr. and Sonobeat, and what effect he had on the Cold Sun sound?

Billy: In retrospect, I can see that Bill Josey was a man of vision. Being involved in radio or recording could give someone a type of power which might prevent them from putting a proper priority on eliciting the use of outside agents. I think that Bill would have done much better if he could have made more

key connections that were not Texas based. That seemed to be the big hope, in fact. I wish I could have helped him more.

UT: Can you tell us about your songwriting process back then, particularly the lyrics. Some of the words sound almost stream of consciousness, while others seem like they must have taken a long time to craft.

Billy: Those songs were written to accommodate the autoharp arrangements. Later things that I played on were the opposite. The autoharp, over time, became a backing instrument, a lead instrument based on the songs written by Roky or whomever, rather than songs written specially around autoharp arrangements. It's ironic that as I became more of a virtuoso I may have abandoned an interesting writing method. I was focused on being good enough to be able to work with writers who are better writers than me. I now accept the idea that the Cold Sun songs are special and unlike anything else. I suppose that I will never write songs like those again—but I already wrote a lot more than the ones on the album. And many were recorded live.

UT: What role did peyote and/or other hallucinogens play in the band?

Billy: We were not into acid. It seemed foolish to be interested in acid with all that peyote and pure mescaline sulfate available. Acid is like glue-sniffing compared to the real thing—peyote. I think mushrooms are equally inferior to mescaline, also. We were weed heads who liked peyote and mescaline. I guess that I liked mescaline quite a bit, come to think of it. All that neon in places like Memphis sure looks great on mescaline.

UT: I noticed on the CD you give shout-outs to the great Joe Meek, Geoff Goddard and Heinz Burt. Were you aware of Joe Meek during the Cold Sun period, and if so, what effect did this have on your sound and approach?

Billy: Yes, I was well aware of Joe Meek and wanted to sound exactly like "Telstar," if possible. I really loved the first great British era. The Beatles seemed several steps down from that. Poor old Joe Meek got washed under the tide like the Elevators did when they were engulfed by the wave of 'psychedelic' bands.

I really think of the Elevators and ALIENS as both sounding like Joe Meek bands. The Doors sounded a bit like a latter day Meek band. They were amazing in that they used store-bought instruments. Getting that sound all on their own, without some resident genius like Joe Meek, is an amazing accomplishment.

I was always into Meek and Del Shannon. I think you can hear more and more of this as time wore on and you can hear that in the Cold Sun live tracks.

Working with Roky was quite a thrill. Actually, Roky is, in reality, just a regular Joe (Meek). It's certainly no coincidence that Roky is popular in England, the country that embraces Lord Sutch.

UT: In the liner notes you say you would consider performing the Cold Sun material again live. Any solid plans yet to make this happen?

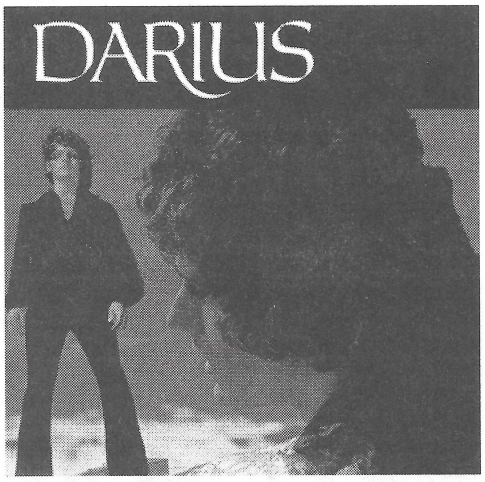
Billy: It has *already* happened. I recently did a show in LA with Tom Mcgarrigle and Mike Waugh. I was in LA and they were in Austin, but on stage with me in LA via cyber link-up. A live drummer was with me on the stage, a guy named Geddes. This was technically experimental but went well. We will soon have the video posted on our coldsundarkshadows MySpace page. We plan to do a completely live tour, soon, to help World In Sound to promote Cold Sun releases. We look forward to this. Mike sounds as dynamic as ever, and Tom does, too.

UT: How do you feel about infinity?

Billy: It may be overrated.

UT: Could this have something to do with the law of exchange?

Billy: It could. •



DARIUS – S/T (World in Sound, Germany) CD

Darius was an archetypal late '60s 'mystic male': a loner and a poet, oozing machismo and Old Spice through the open neck of a puffy-sleeved black velour blouse. Darius (real name: Robert J. Ott) cut his only album in 1969 for Metromedia Records, and it really is a splendid but sadly neglected record.

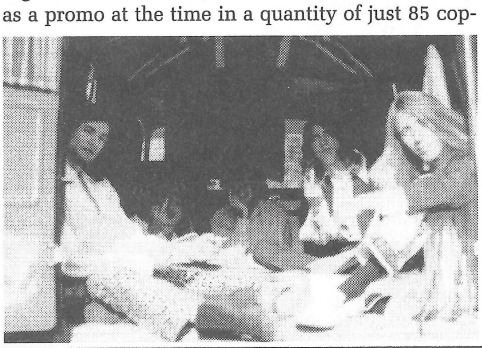
Part Johnny Rivers, part Jim Morrison (with a dash of Neil Diamond and a splash of Mark Lindsay at his most lascivious), Darius holds nothing back vocally on a set of ten original songs, which range in style from stirring psychedelic rock ("Blow My Mind") to down and dirty blues ("Ancient Paths") and sensitive hipster nightclub ballads ("I Feel the Need to Carry On").

For the sessions he was backed by a crew of top-flight Hollywood studio musicians, including guitarists Mike Deasy and Ben Benay, bassist Jerry Scheff, and drummer Toxey French. The band really cooks throughout, especially on the harder-edged uptempo tracks like "Blow My Mind" and "Sweet Mama." Deasy's innovative chops graced many a psychedelic record during this period, including albums by the Ceylieb People, Goldenrod and his memorable solo opus *Friar Tuck & His Psychedelic Guitar*, but some of his finest work can be heard here on Darius's album, such as the spooky volume pedal work on "Mist Veiled Garden," and the spiky leads and surging feedback on "Blow My Mind." Nevertheless it's Darius's powerful persona and dynamic, drama-soaked vocals that steal almost every scene. In a parallel universe somewhere this album would have made him the star he clearly longed to be.

World in Sound's legally licensed CD issue includes three bonus tracks, of which "Don't You Get the Feelin'" is every bit as strong as anything on the original LP. Sadly, Darius passed away in 2006. **(MS)**

DRAGONWYCK – S/T / Fun (World in Sound, Germany) CDs

Formed in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1969, Dragonwyck's roots go back to 1965 and a garage band called the Mortycyans. By 1970, when they recorded their self-titled debut album, they had evidently been smoking a lot of Doors records. The record—issued only as a promo at the time in a quantity of just 85 copies—is soaked in Doors influences, from Kenneth Staab's dominating keyboard riffs to Bill Pettijohn's howling baritone and dark, poetic lyrics. The Doors comparisons are inescapable, and while Dragonwyck can't hope to match up in terms of originality and creative flair, they deliver their songs with so much conviction that it's difficult not to respond. "My Future Waits" and the nine-minute-plus "Fire Climbs" are particularly fine, while Tom Brehm's fuzzed-out psychedelic guitar work is terrific throughout.



The CD also includes five tracks recorded in 1968 by the band's previous incarnation, Sunrise, three of which are earlier versions of songs that would later appear on the Dragonwyck album. Of these, "The Vision" actually eclipses the album version, stretching the song out with some fine guitar and organ interplay, and a slightly more intense lead vocal.

Sound quality on this new World in Sound edition is excellent, and the eight-page booklet includes liner notes and some very cool band photos.

Recorded in 1974, *Fun* was to have been the group's third album, but was never released. By this time they had abandoned their Doors fixation for a more mainstream commercial rock direction, a sound that will have little appeal to most UT readers. Stick with the first one and leave it at that. **(MS)**

DRY RIB - Whose Last Trickle (Messthetics #213, Hyped2Death) CD

If the Syd Barrett and Kevin Ayers British school of eccentrics is your bag, here's a disc you've got to get. Rob Vasey belongs to that same breed. Championed by John Peel and Ed Ball (O Level/TV Personalities/Times), between '78 and '82 he led Dry Rib then the even more bizarrely named as hem syrup (no capital letters), and recorded solo material as well. This CD includes tracks from all these projects, but Vasey's personality is strong enough to make it a cohesive collection. The opening cut, "Quail Seed," is a fantastic freakbeat-meets-post-punk number, with a brilliant guitar break and a bass line made of pure genius. Many tracks like "Beagle's Wag" or "The Mouse & The Bear" show traces of primitive progression, revealing that Vasey's musical taste definitely predated the (new) punk era. Until now, a pretty obscure character, I hope this CD will expose Vasey's talent to the larger audiences he deserves.

One of the releases of the year. **(Laurent Bigot)**

LA DÜSSELDORF – S/T / Viva (Water) CDs

This post-Neu! outfit doesn't seem to benefit from the same cult following as its predecessor, but their first album, recorded in the fall of 1975, deserves as much praise. In the short list of proto-punk kraut rock records, this is one of the very best. The song "La Düsseldorf" is a must-hear for anyone interested in the roots of punk rock. This is even more punk than anything Neu! recorded (I wonder if Johnny Rotten heard this one when it came out?). Yet, as with Neu!, most of the tracks have an ambient feel, somewhere between Eno and the then-coming-soon synth side of the New Wave. The long opening number, "Düsseldorf," is especially good, sounding like a more monolithic Floyd jamming with a punk drummer. Numbers like "Silver Cloud" have a very proto-New Wave feel that may rub some the wrong way, but works fine for me, though is a bit too long. The 45 edit version could be the answer (the 45, with 'La Düsseldorf' on the flipside, has just been reissued on vinyl—with an unfortunately obscene price tag).

Their second album, recorded during the summer of '78, is more of the same, though not as essential. The opening title song is something like proto-Plastic Bertrand. The punkiest track is again the second, "White Overalls." "Geld" isn't too far behind, sounding like a glam version of Tubeway Army. Though not unpleasant, the longest numbers, "Rheinita" (of which a 45 version has also just been